HAROLD.
A friend sent me this article. He reminded me that Stone's version of historical events is not always accurate.

Dave
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'Born on the Fourth of July,' 'Roger and Me' fabricated

If Oliver Stone, who wrote and directed "Born on the Fourth of July," wins an Oscar, Janet Cooke, who got a Pulitzer for writing about an 8-year-old heroin addict who didn't exist, ought to get back her job at The Washington Post.

Just days after reviewing the film about crippled Vietnam vet and anti-war activist Ron Kovic, I was phoned by friends who hinted Stone's movie was something less than the advertised "true story of innocence lost and courage found." Word was spreading.

Last week, the fakery of "Born on the Fourth" spilled out all over the pages of the Washington Times, in an expose by Diana West that ought to be required reading at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Ms. West's piece suggests Stone's film is at best consumer fraud, at worst, a pack of lies written to deceive the young who have no memory of what America was like during Vietnam.

Like Henri Costa-Gavras' anti-American films, Stone's "Born on the Fourth" is built around a true event: Ron Kovic was indeed a Marine, who served honorably in Vietnam, twice, and was badly wounded.

But this central fact in Kovic's life has been hedged about in the film with the fabrications of Oliver Stone.

Kovic's commander in Vietnam, for example, in Kovic's own book, did not crudely dismiss Ron's concern he may have killed a fellow Marine in the heat of the battle. The officer investigated and concluded Kovic had not killed the fellow Marine. In the film, the Marine officer is portrayed as a cold-blooded martinet.

Nor did Kovic visit the family of the dead Marine in Venus, Ga. There is no Venus, Ga.; Kovic never visited any family; he concedes now it was all a dream.

In "Born on the Fourth," the wheelchair-bound vet sustains a clubbing in a police riot that breaks up a peaceful strike at Syracuse University. But, during the real student strike, there was no police assault; Syracuse police did not even come onto campus; it all ended peacefully; and Ron Kovic was never there.

While it's true Kovic did speak at the 1976 Democratic Convention, the film neglects to mention it was to nominate a draft-dodger who had run off to England, rather than serve in Vietnam.

"I'm the biographer . . . I'm obviously telling Ron's story; I'm not screwing with the facts," Stone told the L.A. Times. Fortunately, he was not under oath, for almost every incident critical to the drama, with the exception of the wounding, is falsehood.

Ron never went to his junior or senior prom (he admits that in his own book); he never addressed the July 4 rally in his hometown of Massapequa, which Stone converts into an epiphany; no one recalls anyone at the local bar trashing Kovic for having lost his generation's war.

"Born on the Fourth of July," though, is not the only movie triumph of '89 that turns out to be about as authentic as the Hitler diaries.

"Roger and Me," Michael Moore's "documentary" about his year-long effort to meet General Motors' Chairman Roger Smith and persuade him to come to Flint, Mich., to see the havoc wrought by a GM plant closing, is likewise being exposed as a cinematic hoax.

Contrary to Moore's assertion, GM did not let 30,000 people go in Flint in 1986; there were only 10,000. Where Moore shows Ronald Reagan arriving in the middle of the crisis, Reagan, as president, never visited Flint. He was there as a candidate 10 years ago. The cash register supposedly swiped while the Gipper was speaking in the next room had been stolen days earlier. The Nightline episode, where Ted Koppel is cut off when his transmitter truck is stolen in downtown Flint is hilarious; only, it never happened.

The address by Rev. Robert Schuller, to help boost morale in Flint, portrayed as a prime example of irrelevant boosterism in a social and economic crisis, was delivered in 1982, years before Moore's '86 crisis. Even the core of the film appears false. Contrary to his claim he never got to talk to Roger Smith, Moore is reportedly himself on tape, at two shareholders' meetings, talking to Smith, but never once asking him to come to Flint.

Moore also employs a cross-cutting technique, where footage of Smith giving a saccharine Christmas message is spiced with that of families being evicted, leaving an impression of callous corporate indifference to human suffering. This is palpably dishonest; it is playing with film and fact to suggest a connection that does not exist. It is what was done, accidentally, to George Bush when he was shown joking with press, as networks put on a split screen live footage of bodies of American dead being off-loaded from Panama.

The spirit of Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano lives.

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